

DCFS Weekly Update From the State Office

Friday, July 7, 2000

From My Perspective

By Ken Patterson

I am hearing questions from many of you regarding an upcoming meeting of the Legislative Child Welfare Oversight Panel. The Legislative Oversight Panel was created by the 1994 Utah Child Welfare Reform Act and is a special legislative committee charged with the responsibility for tracking the functioning of Utah's Child Welfare system. The panel looks at a wide range of issues, not just DCFS. Senator Lyle Hillyard and Representative Nora Stephens are the co-chairs. Senator Davis, Representative Throckmorton, and Representative Beck are the remaining committee members. The panel usually meets once per month from April through November.

In their first meeting this year the panel asked the audience (which included DCFS, Attorneys General, Guardians ad Litem, Citizen Review Board, etc.) to list the topics they most wished to see the panel study this year. The Attorney General's Office submitted the idea that perhaps child protection investigations should be split from other Child Welfare services. They have submitted a paper to the panel detailing their thinking. In essence, they are of the opinion that the activities and skills of "investigation" are inconsistent with the skills of assisting with family support, reunification work, or permanency planning. In short they appear to be suggesting a "good cop"/"bad cop" approach.

Jan Graham invited Robin and I to a meeting last February to ask if we could support a study of this approach. We politely said no thanks. We were not interested for several reasons. Here are a few.

- **We are not sure what's broken.** According to CWLA data we are accepting and investigating just slightly less CPS referrals than the national median. We are substantiating the referrals we investigate at the national median. Our response time to referrals has improved each of the past three years. The re-substantiation rate has declined for three consecutive years. Child fatalities on open DCFS cases have significantly diminished. And finally we have a decreasing number of complaints filed with OCPO.
- The approach in **the Attorney General's paper sells short the skill of a Social Worker to discern** and apply what type of interview fits the situation. Each of you who do investigations modulate your approach according the information you have and what you sense about the situation. You know when the situation calls for you to forget relationship building and go right to getting critical information and creating safety. Conversely you know when to apply relationship-building skills. Most importantly you know that assessing the child/family environment is not a one-time event...it is a continual process and looking at safety and well-being are a part of each contact you have with a family whether or not you are in the home for an investigation or service visit.
- **The approach would further chop up a system that already requires consumers to shift their focus** from Social Worker to Social Worker and from therapist to therapist too many times. We are striving to integrate the safety and

treatment functions of our organization under a single model of practice that has everyone's responsibility to create safety, permanence, and well-being. We are trying to reduce the number of times a parent or child has to tell their story to a new person. Additionally we know that about 80% of all referrals are classified as priority three and by their very nature do not suggest that a forensic approach should predominate on the first contact.

We will be arguing these points in front of the panel on Friday the 14th at 9:00 a.m. Abel Ortiz has prepared a very thorough response. The panel has simply placed the topic on the agenda for discussion. There is no draft legislation, there is no suggestion that the panel, or the legislature in general, think this is a good idea. Obviously, DCFS is opposed to a splitting out of the investigative functions. I will let you know how the discussion turns out.

Practice Model Training

By Richard Anderson

Training, learning, growing, and sharing are life-changing experiences. A common response to training of any length in our system is that it is too long. We begin shortening the process even before those asking for it to be shortened know what it is (this is a mystical atmosphere that allows us to know we don't need something before we know what the something is). We will always have different levels of knowledge and skill in our organization, and any training will meet people at different places in their professional development. We will have professional development opportunities that meet individual needs, but we also must have broad coverage training programs that ensure everyone is on the same page on key issues. The way we deliver the training must also be modified to meet the environment in which we are providing training. For example, the format used to train a trainer may have to be modified to best meet the needs of the front-line service delivery person. These modifications are also important. Cutting for cutting sake is not good. Being flexible is vital.

What we need, most of all, is a forum to share our perceptions, knowledge, and skills. We (trainers, facilitators, and learners) can view training as time set aside for building each other professionally, renewing our understanding, and picking up something new or something old that we had forgotten. If we are already at a skill level above the specific training, then let's shift to the roll of facilitator to help those delivering the training and those who are not yet there and briefly coach someone each week on the skills from the last training. This investment in DCFS will pay us back for our efforts by increasing the confidence each of us have in each other and will demonstrate increased effectiveness to all those who work with us.

It seems to me that if we were able to take even one thing from every conference, book, video, or training session and actually make it part of our practice we would become highly skilled and increasingly competent. Otherwise, we can read a lot, go to many training opportunities and still not be any more effective. Of course, the one thing from every one of these activities would have to be a sound practice skill. Just try this. Set a goal of seeking out in every training session at least one thing that you will add to your professional skill bank and use consistently or more effectively. Do it! Try

making at least one thing happen for you better in the future than it would have before you had the training.

When to Complete a Risk Assessment

By Scott Goodell

Several people have asked about the requirements for completing a Risk Assessment in the different service areas at the time of case closure.

- Out-of-home cases: For an SCF case the only time a Risk Assessment is required is if the child is returning to their parent(s). In the Closure Wizard, if the worker selects "Custody Return to Parent," a Risk Assessment is required and the Closure Wizard will not allow the case to be closed without completing the Risk Assessment. If the case is being closed and any other of the Closure Reasons are selected, the Risk Assessment is not required and the Closure Wizard will not check to see if a Risk Assessment was completed. The Risk Assessment is not required for AAM or GAM cases.
- In-home cases: The Risk Assessment is required only for PRP, PFR, PSC, and PSS cases.
- CPS cases: The Risk Assessment is required for all CPS cases.

A Risk Assessment may be completed for all cases if the worker chooses to do so, but the Closure Wizard will only check to see if one was completed for those cases that require a Risk Assessment be completed.

The 2000 Kids Count Data Book

By Carol Miller

The Annie E. Casey Foundation has just announced that its 2000 KIDS COUNT Data Book is now available on-line. This database is a powerful, easy to use, on-line database that allows you to generate your own state profiles, graphs, maps, ranked lists, and more. The 2000 KIDS COUNT Data Book is available today at <http://www.aecf.org/>.

You may call me at 801-538-4451 if you have any questions regarding this data book.